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THE GOALS OF THE CHRISTIAN PULPIT AND GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

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# THE GOALS OF THE CHRISTIAN PULPIT AND GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

The purpose of this study is to alert the reader to the worthwhileness of therapeutic preaching. The similiarity between the aims of preaching and the goals of didactic group psychotherapy will be pointed out and a method of curative preaching will be suggested. In order to stimulate the reader toward a healing pulpit ministry, the historic aims of the Christian pulpit will be mentioned along with the corresponding goals of the didactic group psychotherapeutic process. A viable homiletical encounter utilizes the major principles of the didactic form of group psychotherapy. The auditor, through the utilization of stimulus material offered for study, learning through the process of listening to a suggestive lecture, and being integrated into a friendly and non-hostile group, is able to become aware of his own feelings, behavioral disfunctionings, and how best to successfully deal with his feelings and behavior.

## I. THE GOALS OF PREACHING

The ultimate goal of the sermon is to make men whole. This will mean then, presenting the message of the text in such a fashion that the listener may successfully deal with himself in light of the scriptural involvement, while all the time challenging the listener with the concept of living within the context of his new learning.

Feris D. Whitesell and Lloyd M. Perry classify the goals of the sermon as general and specific. Under the comprehensive heading of "general", three aims are listed: to preach the Word of God, to preach in the power of the Holy Spirit, and to preach with homiletical skill.

These writers go on to list the specific aims of the pulpit. They are instruction, inspiration, devotion, correction, conversion.  $^2$ 

Roy Pearson, in his The Ministry of Preaching, has

<sup>1</sup>Faris D. Whitesell and Lloyd M. Perry, <u>Variety in Your Preaching</u>, (Westwood, N.J.:Fleming H. Revell Company, 1954), pp. 21,22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 24,25.

asserted the purpose of preaching to be threefold, i.e., "proclamation, demonstration, and implantation."

Herrick Johnson says the following about the goal of preaching:

The supreme aim is perfect manhood in Christ Jesus. The preacher's finished work is not a finished sermon, but a Christlike soul. He constructs a sermon that he may reconstruct a man. Salvation is his weekly purpose, not reformation, not social improvement, not intellectual uplift, not aesthetic delight, but salvation in its broad Scriptural sense.

It needs to be pointed out that the goal of a sermon is somewhat conditional. Those factors which make it conditional are the occasion and the audience. Once the speaker has settled in his thinking the sociological factors of the occasion and knows the intellectual capacity of the audience, along with its needs, he may then begin to work toward a pre-established goal.

The aim of the sermon, having these conditions, is realized through the type of sermon employed. Pulpit speech

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Roy Pearson, <u>The Ministry Of Preaching</u>, (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1959), pp. 15-25.

Herrick Johnson, The Ideal Ministry, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), p. 29.

is a means to an end and the end determines the type of means used. The evangelistic sermon aims at evangelism, the ethical sermon aims at direction, the doctrinal sermon aims at a clear view of God and man.

Andrew Blackwood contends that the aim of every homiletical venture is conditional to human needs. He asserts that the "life-situation sermon," which may be doctrinal, ethical, evangelistic or a combination of all three, is the type of sermon that best meets the needs of all people.

Sensing human needs is the cornerstone of the pastoral message. No message can be therapeutic unless it seeks to adequately care for the frustrations, anxieties, fears and worries of the Christian and non-Christian alike. The message to the Christian and non-Christian may differ in terms of initial faith and mature faith, but both thrusts must be encompassed within the borders of a single pulpit encounter. The minister must deliver, within the fleeting

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>Andrew W. Blackwood, <u>The Preparation</u> <u>Of Sermons</u>, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948), p. 34.

moments of a worship service, a message to meet the needs of all men. The pastor must have skill in using the Word of God to produce an emotional and spiritual "openness" and "nakedness" within the human life. This homiletical task would be well nigh impossible if it were not for the Holy Spirit opening the eyes of the spiritually blind and building up the saints of God in ". . . grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18a).

Under the heading of sensing and meeting human needs, the writer wishes to pinpoint, from the standpoint of his own experience, the great over-all aims of the Christian pulpit.

# CONVERSION

This is reconciliation to God the Father through God the Son; the creating of a new personality, called in scripture, "the new man" (Colossians 3:10a), or "a new creature" (II Corinthians 5:17b). It is an intellectual, emotional and volitional turning from one form of behavior to another.

# ADJUSTMENT

This phase of the pulpit goal is applicable to the writer and perhaps to others who have experienced a sudden

transformation of belief and behavior. When the grace of God influences one immersed in spiritually inappropriate behavior, and a new set of standards for belief and action are immediately accepted, a period of time is needed for adequate adjustment from one way of thinking and acting to another method of believing and living.

## GROWTH IN FAITH

The reconciled person must be urged at each pulpit encounter to daily adjust to the presence of the Holy Spirit so that His influence will be meaningful. The life of the child of God must be lived, as Paul has said, "... by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20b). God has given the office of the pastor "... for the perfecting of the saints" (Ephesians 4:12a), so that each Christian may "... come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, UNTO A PERFECT MAN, UNTO THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE OF THE FULNESS OF CHRIST" (Ephesians 4:13). (Capitals mine).

#### II. DIDACTIC GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

Didactic group psychotherapy has never received the unqualified and universal approval of psychotherapists as an accepted discipline. Other well founded approaches to therapy, such as hyperpyrexis, anti-convulsant chemotherapy, hydrotherapy, chemical sedation and hypnotherapy have difficulty regarding their rationalized acceptance by psychiatry as valid approaches to psychotherapy. Over the years the art of psychotherapy has developed as a one to one encounter. A certain relationship between counselor and counselee has emerged as a viable contribution to mental health within the framework of the psychotherapeutic setting.

It is a well known fact of therapy that many individuals are not amenable to individual therapy. In psychoanalysis, the individual who presents himself to the analyst is self-selected. The individual makes the first contact, probably knowing something of treatment, possessing
an acceptable level of intelligence and is afflicted with
psychopathology not so severe that therapeutic insight

cannot erupt into consciousness. Even with patient selfselection, and further selection by the analyst, psychoanalysis is frequently unsuccessful.

of all the individuals who are in dire need of psychotherapy, only a very small number qualify for individual psychoanalysis. The different levels of psychopathology among humans seem to insist on various levels of treatment. Because an individual does not qualify for psychoanalysis does not mean that no psychotherapy is available to him. Marsh points out that there are only two methods available to approach the disturbed person - the individual and the group approach. The group approach is not as limited or as inadequate as the individual approach.

Didactic group psychotherapy is akin to the educative process. Kaplan writes:

Education in its true and biological significance means the acquisition of a broad perspective of the surrounding world leading to adequate attitudes and beliefs. It imparts a sense of relationship of man to man and to the universe he inhabits. It encompasses mature judgment in the light of abiding values.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>L. Cody Marsh, "Group Treatment Of The Psychoses By The Psychological Equivalent Of The Revival," Mental Hygiene, XV (January, 1931), 328-349.

It is one means by which that currently much bandied about desideratum, "emotional maturity," is acquired; also emotional stability, a stability which is not founded on insensitivity, but which, rather, is the fruit of a profound appreciation of the human scene, its significances, and connotations.

Pedagogy, as an instrument of therapy, is a major thrust in the maintenance of psychic homeostasis. The primacy of man's intellect, as Freud voiced his hopes in man's future, is crucial in man's motives and behavior. What transpires in the class of a sophisticated lecturer and teacher is a process akin to the transference of psychotherapy. Kaplan explains:

The process of learning is not merely one of passive absorption, for its most powerful implement is motivation, and the most successful teacher consciously or unconsciously comes to employ it through the transference relationship.

Mental and emotional disorders do not invariably come from the deeper levels of psychopathology. Instinctual energies maladapted, are not the only causes for men-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>J.W.Kaplan, "The Case For Didactic Group Psychotherapy," Eds., Max Rosenbaum, Milton Berger, Group Psychotherapy And Group Function, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1963), p. 331.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

tal or social illnesses. The cognitive levels of psychic functioning are responsible for many personality disturbances. When the latter is true for an individual, suiting the psychotherapeutic approach to the level of pathology would not insist on the grand technique of individual psychotherapy or psychoanalysis, but the didactic (educational role) approach. Obviously, disorders which have their origin, at least in part, in social interrelationships are best treated in the social setting in which they arose. This is often a good preparation, if needed, for intensive individual psychotherapy.

In the didactic group situation, the person finds protection in the natural setting of other people. While preserving his anonymity he, at the same time, discovers that his situation is in no way unique, but that he has a great deal in common with the problems and difficulties of fellow humans. He comes out of his isolation and focuses upon his problem with the view of understanding and conquering it. Marsh has adopted as his motto, after a great many years of involvement in the didactic approach,

By the crowd they have been broken, By the crowd they shall be healed.

Marsh gives great credence to the lecture method of therapy. Attendance is voluntary and the principles enunciated by LeBon, in his work, The Crowd, are utilized. Singing is always the first event of the program for, he indicates, it strikes the "crowd keynote" and the individuals in the class are merged into a "oneness."

The teaching or lecturing method of group psychotherapy demands that the therapist produce stimulus material to activate the class. If the class is maximally stimulated, emotional disturbance can be identified and hopefully appropriately handled.

Wolberg, in his chapter "Reeducative Therapy" says of directive psychotherapy:

Directive approaches put the therapist in an active role in determining which of the basic problems of the patient to attack, the immediate or remote objective, and the promotion of a plan of action. Persuasive and commanding tactics are often employed, the therapist exerting strong pressures on the patient, even purposefully mobilizing his tension, or reducing it with supportive techniques if tension becomes unbearable.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>Marsh, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 330.

Goals are more or less invested in the therapist, who makes an effort to dissect, tear down, rebuild and resynthesize the personality. 10

A further definition of this approach is defined by Dr. Wolberg as "Directive-didactic" and he explains:

Bringing small groups together to discuss matters of special interest to the members constitutes an important reeducative measure. . . . In less active groups the therapist may deliver prepared talks or lectures around which the deliberations may proceed. Even Bible-reading classes have formed the basis for therapeutic assemblages. There is some advantage to organized presentations in settings where personnel changes are the rule, relatively little disruption being experienced when the regular group leader is replaced by a new leader who continues with mimeographed or printed material. Books and readings may be assigned as part of the proceedings. . . . This method has the advantage of calming the group by enhancing the placebo effect and putting the therapist in the role of the benevolent healer. 1

The use of a textbook, from which the lecture is taken is extremely helpful in bibliotherapy. The didactic approach is greatly aided when a textbook is introduced into the group psychotherapeutic setting for it reawakens the intellectual curiosity of the class members. Klapman

<sup>10</sup> Lewis R. Wolberg, The Technique Of Psychotherapy, (2 vols.; New York: Grune and Stratton, 1967), I, 126.

<sup>11&</sup>lt;sub>Ibid.</sub>, 147.

and Lundin say, "A textbook for psychotherapy in no way eliminates the therapist, just as a textbook on any other subject does not eliminate the teacher or vice verse." 12

The lecturer finds that a textbook in the didactic group psychotherapeutic situation is of great convenience.

Kaplan and Lundin summarize these conveniences:

(a) The book provides a systematic, planned, logical system of stimulus material which serves to stimulate patient's associations and aberations as well as purposes of re-education. (b) Instead of patients remaining passive auditors, as they must necessarily be during the greater part of the time during lectures, they become active participants when they read aloud, comment on what they have read and associate to it. (c) The textbook furnishes stimulus material the use of which does not depend upon the verbal skill of the therapist. (d) The textbook furnishes readily available stimulus material for classwork, insuring a continuity of method, subject matter (stimulus material) and objective, especially useful should a new therapist have to take over the group, permanently or temporarily. (e) Although it would not seem possible to standardize the practice of group psychotherapy, use of the textbook supplies the nearest approach to a standard as far as stimulus material is concerned, and thus offers some basis of comparison between one group and another. (f) The printed word carries some additional authority. Obviously the printed word is capable of great abuse, but if it is sincerely employed

<sup>12</sup>J.W.Klapman and W.H.Lundin, "Objective Appraisal Of Textbook-mediated Group Psychotherapy with Psychotics," International Journal Of Group Psychotherapy, II (1952), 117,118.

in the interest of truth and therapy, we may appropriate this advantage too with a good conscience. (g) Textbook-mediated group psychotherapy does not exclude other methods of administration. In fact, most other avenues of approach to therapy can more or less easily be integrated into its framework,  $^{13}$ 

The didactic approach to group psychotherapy includes not only the lecture of the therapist, but also the participation of the individual within the group through his personal study of the stimulus material. The intellect of the troubled person is thus stimulated from two points of therapeutic advantage, the therapist himself and the written material. The stimulus material embroiders the lecture and the latter makes clear specific parts of the book.

The most important product of textbook-mediated group psychotherapy is the conditioning of the personality on the ego-involved level. Not only is the self-conscious conditioned through suggestive lectures, but a re-ordering of the conceptualizing functions of the auditor is realized. Klapman and Lundin assert:

The authors are of the opinion that because there is more or less direct reciprocal relationships between

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

the intellectual and the affective components, a restructuring of the personality may be expected from the aformentioned therapy. Obviously, whenever one element of a dynamically functioning system is altered, a newer gestalt must perforce follow, with the organism thus reacting on the basis of a changed frame of reference, 14

This author believes that textbook-mediated group psychotherapy is a worthwhile approach toward the mental stability and health of many thousands of people, who are not disturbed enough to be candidates for intensive individual psychotherapy or psychoanalysis. Their disturbance is sufficient to prevent an understanding of self or an appreciation of the motivating factors of their behavior. Analysis by a competent psychoanalyst is by far the most desirable state of being for all. To understand the unconscious involvement of our infant and early stages of life upon our present conscious living is, without doubt, the apex of self appreciation and knowledge. Society's problem is that this eludes the grasp of most people and the average individual daily suffers from lack of analysis, of self understanding. Many know not the causes for their emotional

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

disturbances and psychotherapeutic realization of their motivations and behavior escapes them.

The religious pulpit offers to the mass of people a genuine thrust toward textbook-mediated didactic group psychotherapy. A highly skilled and sophisticated lecturer may intellectually and emotionally involve a group of listeners, not only in a serious and well outlined response producing lecture, but also in an authoriatative answer or alternative to undesirable behavior.

## III. A SUGGESTED METHOD OF THERAPEUTIC PREACHING

Therapeutic preaching is communicating the Word of God in a positive and richly suggestive manner. Dr. Stolz claims that therapeutic preaching is, "Preaching that finds men, searches them and helps them to overcome the obstacles to the enrichment of personality." It is person-centered, related to life, courageously clear, making plain life's meanings and purpose, spiritually and psychologically mature and utilitarian to the Holy Spirit. Preaching that heals is rooted in the absolutes of Scripture, embroidered with human sincerity, and possessing critical insight, humor and empathy. Curative preaching is worshipful, educative, capable of individual response and group action.

Concerning the worshipping of the individual or group, Dr. Stolz says:

A congregation engaged in public worship is under hygienic influence. Being together, singing together, praying together, reading the Scripture together, hearing the sermon together, the people, without being

<sup>15</sup>Karl R. Stolz, The Church And Psychotherapy, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), p. 198.

conscious of it, are participating in a co-operative enterprise of improving personal and inter-human relationships. The preacher in the pulpit is a mental hygienist. Under his preaching the people in the pews are receiving enlightenment and inspiration. Lives are being enriched with meaning, with loyalty to Christ, and with a sense of mission. Aimlessness and loneliness are being dispersed by the communion of — the believers. Christian principles are being clarified and made effective. 16

Some suggestions for a therapeutic encounter are:

1. The preacher himself must be a competent personality. Idealy, he should go through analysis or at least become involved in a clinical setting for group psychotherapy. The adequate pastor/preacher, in order to be effective in his communication of the power of God, must be in touch with his own feelings, appreciate his own conscious motives and have some understanding of his unconscious motivation as it impacts on his behavior; be able to achieve sensitivity to the needs of people and the resources of God. He must be a person of belief and faith so that his behavior inspires conscious trust in him on the part of the people. The psychologically alert preacher can move into

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

the thoughts and feelings of people when he acquires the ability to identify with them. This learned sensitivity lends itself toward therapeutic preaching.

- 2. Schedule the preaching service early enough in the day to permit group discussion following the sermon. Feedback of individual feelings to the other members of the group will act as a catalyst for insight. The educative thrust of the sermon can be assessed by the preacher by listening to the quality of the feedback. More complete explanations of a significant point of the sermon may be offered at this time. Psychic homeostatis is maintained therapeutically through pedagogy.
- 3. Always announce the text and title of the sermon one week in advance. Those who plan to participate in the feedback session are able to study the text and think about it during the week. Intense study of the written material will stimulate the reader's intellect; cause a re-ordering of rational behavior by conditioning the self-conscious in the light of the authoritarian nature of Scripture. The sermon will serve to act as an additional imput to what has already been studied and the feedback session will aid in

gaining additional insight as to how others understand the stimulus producing reading (Scripture) and sermon.

- 4. Utilize the principles of group cohesiveness and crowd persuasion as outlined by LeBon. The person in the pew, when made to feel a part of a friendly group with problems and disturbances much akin to his own, ceases to feel isolated within the group and begins to focus upon his own feelings and possible adjustments. The group that is conscious of spiritual realities becomes curative to each of its members, and in such an intellectual/emotional setting, the individual will respond to suggestions easier than when he is not motivated by the impulsiveness of the group.
- 5. The sermon itself, if it is to be healing in nature and character, must move from the present-day pulpit monologue to a dynamic dialogical speech. Monologue speaking creates too many barriers to meaning and feeling. Monologue speech reflects only the speaker and insists upon agreement from the listener. It is not open-ended as to response, gives no space for maneuver by the auditor, is basically uncreative and seeks no encounter.

Dialogue, on the other hand, seeks a response from

the auditor. It does not exploit those who listen by insistence upon any particular point of view. Rather, it attempts to experience the feelings of all in the group, from their non-verbal responses, for the purpose of unmasking false attitudes, rediscovery of self and others, of love and of God. The therapeutic sermon delivered in a dialogical fashion, responds to what the listeners communicate. It becomes a creative instrument of God for revelation and cure.

Within the enlightening environment of dialogue, the auditor learns from the vast accumulation of Scriptural knowledge and the experiences of people in response to that knowledge. This in turn aids the listener to reach a responsible decision. The dialogical sermon helps to restore the tensions of life, the relationship between what was and what is, between conformity and vitality. Dialogical preaching invites confrontation. The listener is urged toward encounter with himself and others. This kind of encounter causes re-appraisals, re-assessments and renewals.

 Most important to curative preaching is the role of the Holy Spirit within the pulpit encounter. If indeed the aim of the sermon is to make men whole - - the Holy Spirit is the one who ultimately accomplishes the task. The preacher may use sound principles of speech persuasion, be aware of the dynamics of group instruction and behavioral improvement, be acquainted with the various schools of psychic thought and be able to utilize their insights in individual and group settings, but if the meaning of "wholeness" is regeneration, then God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, must be operative in the therapeutic encounter. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is indespensible to any soteriological action.

Salvation is a dynamic transformation of man himself. Within the curative setting, the grace of God, displayed through the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ, and demonstrated by the justifying ministry of the Holy Spirit becomes a reality.

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